DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 877 HE 029 819

TITLE	The Restructuring of the Montana University System: Phase Two. Board of Regents Resolution, July 6, 1995.
INSTITUTION	Montana State Board of Regents of Higher Education, Helena.; Montana Univ. System, Helena. Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education.
PUB DATE	6 Jul 95
NOTE	6p.; For related documents, see ED 029 818-820.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Persistence; *Administrative Change; *Administrative Organization; *Administrative Policy; Admission Criteria; Higher Education; Job Placement; *Organizational Change; Organizational Objectives; Paying for College; Planning; Program Improvement; Remedial Instruction; School Holding Power; State Universities; Student College Relationship; Student Employment; Student Financial Aid
IDENTIFIERS	*Montana; Montana State University; *Montana University System; University of Montana

ABSTRACT

This report explains phase two in the restructuring of the Montana University System. In this stage the process focuses on students rather than on the institution, and on the learning process and supporting activities. Four goals are established: (1) getting in, (2) getting through, (3) getting a job, and (4) "paying the way." Recommendations to reach these goals include: raising entry standards; eliminating remedial education at 4-year institutions; shortening the time to degree; developing aggressive advisory programs; implementing a systematic skills assessment program; limiting undergraduate degrees to 120 semester hours; developing incentives to support outstanding teaching; improving technology and staff development; implementing of a systemwide course-numbering system; making core requirements transferable within the system; enhancing two-year educational programs; and establishing a financial aid plan and financial aid services. In addition to these student-centered incentives, other initiatives call for improvements in maintaining physical plants, greater administrative services efficiency, productivity gains, and replacing campus role and scope statements with educational services responsibilities based on price and quality. (CH)

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ED 402 877

BOARD OF REGENTS
RESOLUTION

THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM PHASE TWO

July 6, 1995

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BOARD OF REGENTS RESOLUTION
July 6, 1995

The Restructuring of the Montana University System—Phase Two

Phase one of restructuring is one year old. While considerable work remains, new relationships are taking hold and the objectives of restructuring are being accomplished. As the work continues, the Board of Regents resolves to commence immediately the second phase of the restructuring process. Two aspects of phase two distinguish this initiative from phase one. First, the focus is on the student, not the institution; and the principal consideration is on the learning process and supporting activities. Second, the objectives are put into the clearest terms possible for students, parents, and taxpayers. The emphasis is on communication that is understandable to consumers, not just to those in education.

The goals of phase two are captured in four elements of the education process, factors of primary concern to students and parents. These are:

(1) getting in—making the transition between current activities and postsecondary education;

(2) getting through—overcoming the many academic and nonacademic challenges that are part of the educational experience;

(3) getting a job—finding employment after graduation, particularly a job that utilizes a person's education; and

(4) paying the way—coping with rising prices, shifting financial aid responsibilities, and weakening government support.

Activities are focused within these four student-centered categories. All recommendations will be completed by February 15, 1996, with progress reports presented to the Board of Regents at the September, November, and January meetings and Board approval expected in March 1996. The reports will include specific objectives and timetables. Where applicable, implementation will commence immediately. The emphasis is on outcomes, and the inquiry should consider but not be limited to the following:

✓ The raising of entry standards to all Montana University System four-year campuses and the introduction of proficiency-based entry criteria; suggested implementation by fall 1997.

- ✓ The elimination of remedial education at four-year institutions and the provision that students will pay full cost (state-support level plus tuition) for any remedial work taken within the Montana University System.

- ✓ Shortened time to degree by focusing on the front end of the entry process, the high school/postsecondary transition, and emphasizing advanced placement, tech prep, and other programs that meld secondary and postsecondary schooling.

- ✓ Continuation of current efforts to develop aggressive advising programs on all Montana University System campuses with particular importance given to academic, financial, and career planning during the transition to postsecondary education.

- ✓ A systematic assessment process that evaluates the skills attainment and employer satisfaction with Montana University System graduates. Are graduates prepared for the job market? Are they prepared for the next level of education? Are the educational programs preparing students appropriately?

- ✓ The designing of all undergraduate degrees within 120 semester hours and the elimination of state support after 135 undergraduate credit hours. Today, current undergraduate curriculum is designed at not less than 128 semester credits, but average undergraduate credits are running as high as 150 hours and time to degree at just under 10 semesters. The new focus is on quality within 120 credits and return to the four-year degree. Are students graduating in a reasonable time frame with the necessary tools to enter the job market or pursue graduate/professional work.

- ✓ Incentives to support outstanding teaching.

- ✓ High budget priority given to technology and faculty/staff development with a stated percentage of each year's operating budget designated and invested in upgrading the skills of faculty and staff. Emphasis placed on improving teaching effectiveness and instructional technology.

- ✓ By July 1, 1996, if a student has completed the core requirements on a campus of the Montana University System, the student has completed the core for all the system's four-year institutions.

- ✓ By July 1, 1997, implementation of a common, systemwide, course-numbering system.

- ✓ Graduation guarantees at all campuses by spring 1996.

- ✓ Recommendations that address new workforce realities and provide specifics for the enhancement of two-year education.

- ✓ A separate systemwide effort to establish a Montana plan for financial aid and financial aid services. The review should consider a higher education savings alternative for Montanans, state-based funding options, and financial planning assistance for students and parents. In an environment of higher prices and greater debt, helping students pay is the objective of this undertaking.

Several initiatives do not fit precisely into the four-part, student-centered approach because they are pervasive in scope yet crucial to the overall success of phase two objectives. These include:

- ✓ Precise remedies to supplement the state's deferred maintenance efforts. Functional and relevant physical plants are vital to the learning process, and state dollars are inadequate to meet deferred maintenance needs. We must become more creative in addressing this problem, particularly in exploration of financial options.

- ✓ A major initiative to address efficiency of administrative services. The recommendations will include but not be limited to purchasing, contracting, liability insurance, auditing, facilities management, personnel administration, financial aid services, and technology management. Private-sector incentives and business practices will be adopted wherever appropriate. Benchmarking will be used as applicable. The goal is to review operations and to identify activities that can be done more efficiently by privatizing.

- ✓ As productivity gains result in savings to offset (1) the rising cost of education and (2) the reduction in state support, a plan to reinvest in higher education. Incentives and investment are the building blocks of future efficiency and effectiveness. Agreement must be reached that savings from productivity increases are shared between the state and higher education and then within higher education among managers at all levels. In other words, an incentive structure is needed that encourages managers to find new ways to do business. Skimming all the savings off the top and simply reducing financial commitments by an equal amount are counterproductive to long-term sustainability. These savings provide the funding sources for future investment and, therefore, future productivity increases. Business logic that links savings and investment is

the model's fundamental ingredient for the productivity-savings-investment-productivity cycle to succeed.

- ✓ The elimination of campus role and scope statements. Program responsibilities would no longer be awarded based on territory. Rather, providers of educational services would be chosen based on price and quality. As state educational and training needs are identified, the proposed procedure would reward the best alternative. The preferred program might come from the public or private sectors. It might come from out-of-state providers through distance learning. Needs would be translated to requests for proposals (RFPs), and "bids" would be entertained by the Regents. The criteria would include state requirements, financial viability, and quality of services. Within the Montana University System, units would be encouraged to compete for programs in the bidding process. Monopoly would give way to competition. The goal is to create a competitive environment and get the best deal for the state.

Restructuring was a response to the changing requirements of our state. Phase two will take us to the next step in this process and focus attention on the greatest concerns of Montana's students, parents, and citizens.